

# **Evidence-Based Prevention of School Shootings**

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# School Shootings – More Common But Extremely Rare

- Studies by *Mother Jones* (Follman et al., 2013) and the FBI (Blair & Schweit, 2014) both concluded that school shootings have increased in recent years, but:
- The risk of homicide for school-age youth is roughly 226 times greater outside of school than at school (National Center for School Safety).
- “Any given school can expect to experience a student homicide about once every 6,000 years” (Borum et al., 2010, p. 27).
- “Only about 1 in 2,000,000 school-age youth will die from homicide or suicide at school each year” (Muschert, 2007, p. 61). More likely to be struck by lightning.

# What are the causes of school rampage shootings?



# **What are the causes of school rampage shootings?**

- **Mental health issues, such as personality disorders, psychosis, depression, and suicidal ideation**
- **Negative relationships with peers, such as victimization through bullying**
- **Exclusionary teenage cliques**
- **Homogeneous communities**
- **Gender norms around masculinity**
- **Desire for fame/infamy**
- **Gun availability**

# **Cumulative Strain Theory**

**(Levin & Madfis, 2009; Madfis & Levin, 2013)**

**Chronic Strain**



**Uncontrolled Strain**



**Acute Strain**



**The Planning Stage**



**The Massacre**

# Averted School Rampage



## Philly Police Foil Teen's Plot to Attack School

Seize huge cache of weapons on display in his bedroom

Oct 11, 2007 8:51 PM CDT



## Bomb Explodes in Home of NY Teen Columbine 'Fan'

Sep 30, 2009 2:07 AM CDT



## Another Teen Nabbed in Columbine-Like Plot

Apr 25, 2008 9:04 AM CDT



## Bombs Found Near School on Columbine Anniversary

Apr 21, 2011 5:10 AM CDT



## Tampa Police: We Stopped School Massacre

Aug 17, 2011 12:48 PM CDT

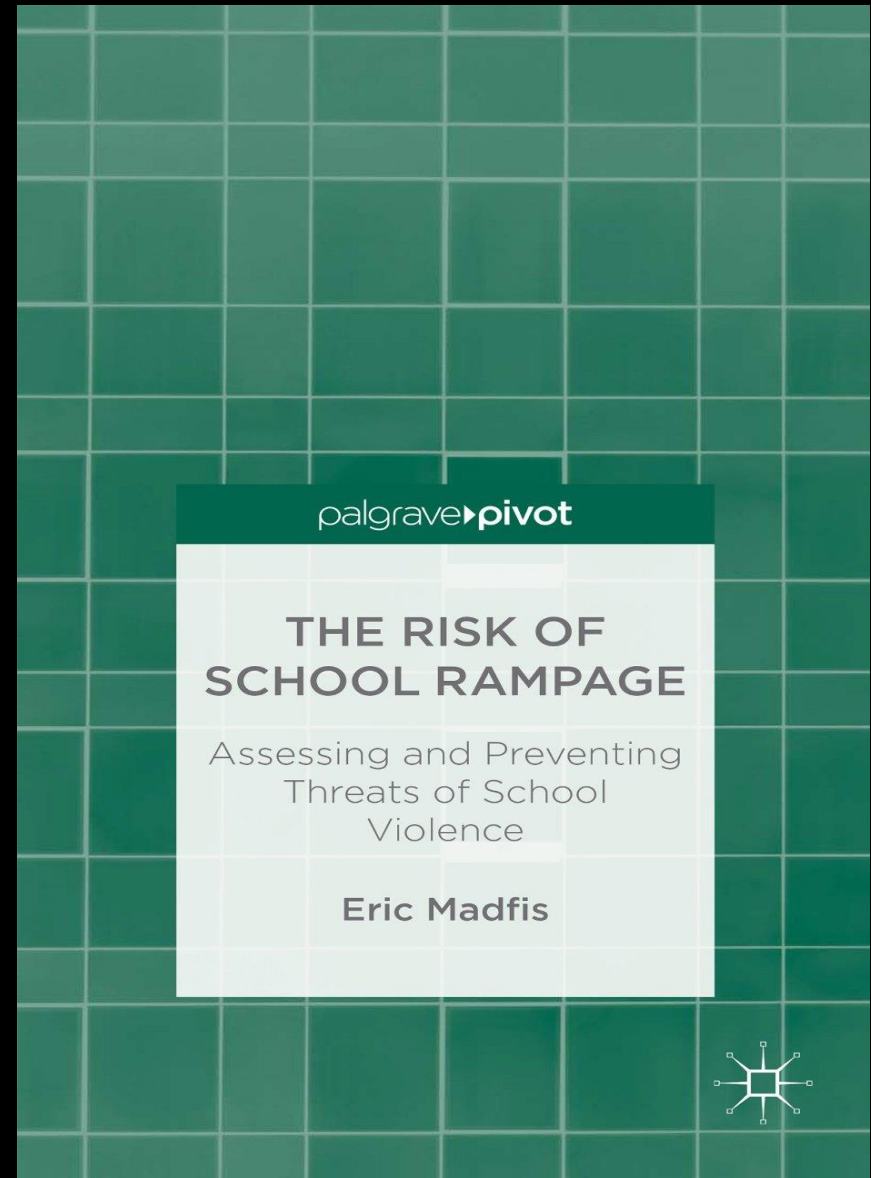


## SC Teen Busted in 'New Columbine' Plot

Apr 21, 2008 5:29 AM CDT

# Research Methods

- Located 195 cases across USA from 2000-2009
- Granted access to 11 public schools that averted a rampage attack
- In-depth interviews with people directly involved in averting incidents (administrators, counselors, security/police officers, and teachers)
- Triangulated with newspaper reporting, court transcripts, legal briefs, and police incident reports



# **Current School Violence Prevention Practices:**

## **Punitive Discipline & Amplified Security:**

- Zero Tolerance Policies
- Surveillance via School Resource Officers and Cameras
- Arming Faculty
- Metal Detectors

## **Violence Risk Assessment:**

- Profiling and Warning Signs
- The Threat Assessment Approach

# School Rampage Prevention

## What has worked:

- Threat assessments based on how direct, detailed, developed, and actionable the plots were, not warning signs or profiles
- Positive bystander behavior (students coming forward to SRO's, counselors, administrators, and teachers) – linked to positive school climates and restorative discipline where students trust school staff

# Forms of Risk Assessment

## Threat Assessment Criteria:

- **Assessing the Plot's Detail** – victim(s) targeted, location(s) selected, date and timing planned
- **Appraising Weaponry** – presence of weapons (firearms, knives, ammo, pipe bombs, explosives, chains and locks), attempts to obtain/manufacture weapons, weapons training

## Profiling or Warning Sign Criteria:

- **Personal Characteristics** – ethnic/racial and gender identity, previous misbehavior, and prior mental health issues
- **Group Characteristics** – school social status, deviant subcultural affiliation

- 6:00 1. Wake up at 6:00
- 6:15 2. Take caffeine pills, energy drinks, and xtra energy etc.
- 6:40 3. Make sure all guns ammo are ready, bombs are prepped, guns clean, all equipment ready, cigs, lighters, slings, ammo holders, alcohol
- 7:00 4. Have last meal, place all equipment on side of house
- 7:15 5. Get dropped off/walk to school
- 9:30 6. Wait until 9:30 then go back home
- 10:00 7. Prep, bombs, guns explosive in car
- 10:15 8. Get cell phone numbers
- 10:20 9. Enjoy life for half an hour
- 10:50 10 . Go to parking lot, call friends
- 11:00 11. Prep car bomb, ANFO [ammonium nitrate fuel oil]
- 11:05 12. Go inside have some fun
13. When done have some vodka, a smoke
14. Commit suicide

# **Bystander Behavior and the Student Code of Silence**

## **Breaking the Code – Interventions through Leakage**

(when plotter reveals info about their impending attack – through threats, boasts, or warnings)

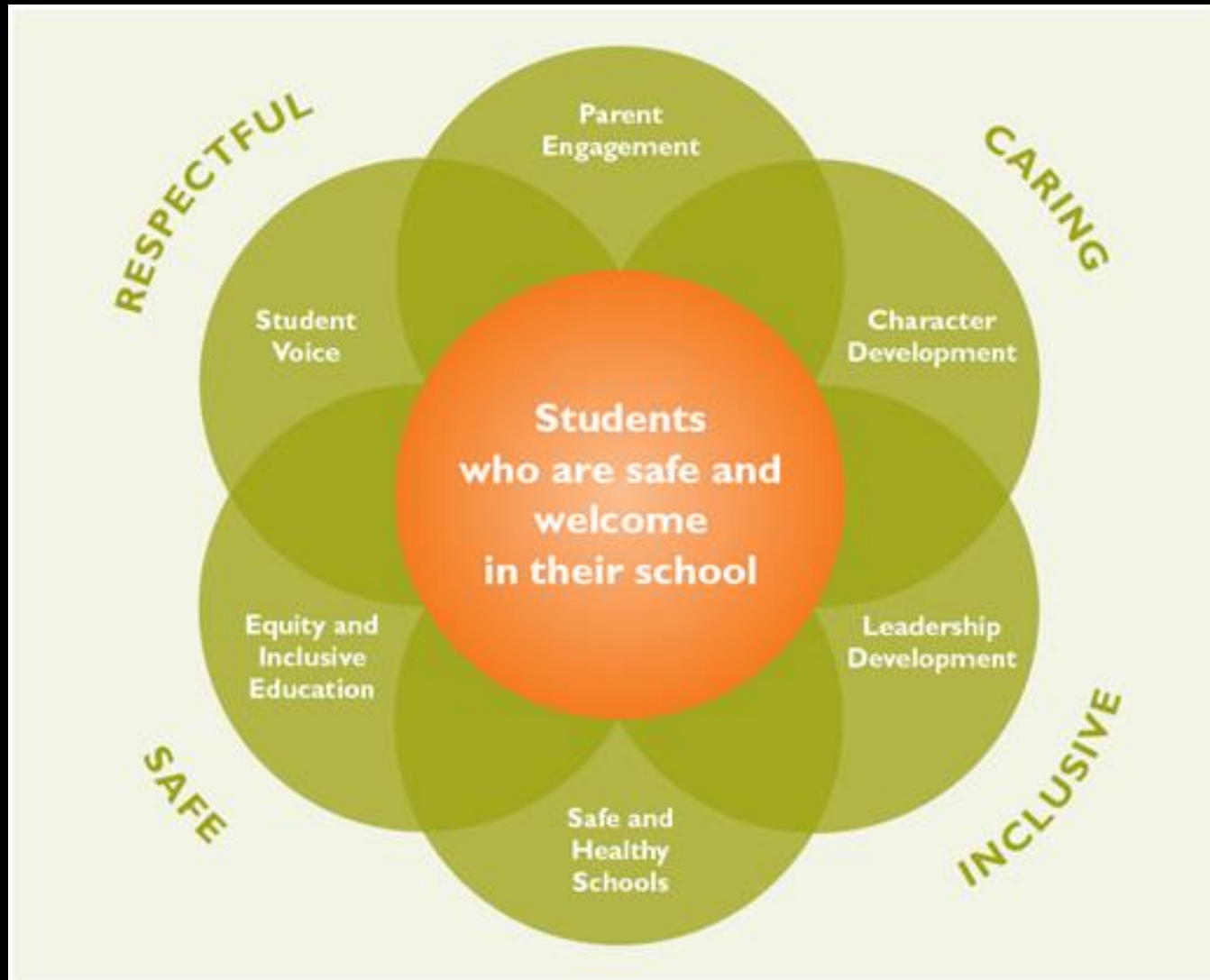
- Indirectly Informed Bystanders, Directly Informed Confidants, Threatened Targets, Involved Co-Conspirators

## **Following the Code – Bystander Inaction**

- People coming forward were rarely directly informed confidants or close friends, but were often acquaintances, targets, and even co-conspirators
- In nearly all cases, far more students knew and did not come forward than the number of students who knew and did come forward

**Genuinely positive school climates are needed to foster positive bystander behavior**

# What is School Climate?



# What does a positive school climate look like?

- High student involvement in school activities
- Students can make friends easily
- Students feel comfortable seeking assistance from school personnel
- Classroom curricula reflect student needs and are inclusive of student experiences (i.e. poverty, sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity, etc.)
- Students are involved in shared decision making opportunities related to school policies and school improvement
- Norms and rules are consistently enforced in a fair manner

# Positive School Climates

- Plentiful education research indicates the important relationship between supportive and trusting school climates and positive student bystander behavior. This is often not the current educational climate – thus positive bystander behavior remains rare
- Focus should be on forging positive school climates and restorative disciplinary practices – this, in turn, will increase positive bystander behavior when leakage occurs

# Restorative Justice

- Repairing harm(s) caused by crime, considers the role of victims, offenders, and communities
- Concerned with healing victims' wounds, restoring offenders to law-abiding lives, and repairing harm done to interpersonal relationships and the community
- Victims take an active role, and offenders are encouraged to understand the harm they have caused their victims and to take responsibility

# Restorative Discipline

- Restorative justice applied to school discipline
- A paradigm shift in how we think about student discipline
- An alternative to “exclusionary” discipline

# Goals of Restorative Discipline in Schools

- Create a restorative and inclusive school climate rather than a punitive and exclusionary one
- Decrease suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary referrals by holding youth accountable for their actions through repairing harm and making amends
- Include people who have harmed, been harmed, and their surrounding community in restorative responses to school misconduct
- Reengage youth at risk of academic failure and juvenile justice system entry through dialogue-driven, restorative responses to school misbehavior

# Beneficial Findings

## Restorative practices in schools:

- Improved school climate – build better relationships among students and faculty, increased student trust in school authority figures, increased satisfaction with disciplinary outcomes, increased view of procedural justice and fairness of punishment
- Increased reporting of problematic behaviors to staff
- Increased victim satisfaction and healing
- Increased offender empathy
- Reduced juvenile delinquency and re-offending - decreased bullying, school violence, and student drug use
- Reduced suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary referrals
- Improved both staff and student attendance, student tardiness decreased
- Parents felt more connected to school

# Conclusions

- Officials who averted attacks deemed threat assessment criteria to be the most crucial, and these criteria gave them far more confidence in the validity of their assessments – this speaks to the value of considering context and severity over zero tolerance and unreliable predictive measures
- Focus should be on forging positive school climates and restorative disciplinary practices – this, in turn, will increase positive bystander behavior when leakage occurs
- Both solutions not only thwart rampage attacks but have additional potential for reducing school exclusions and diminishing the school-to-prison pipeline